



Kill the flame: Grills cause more than 2,000 fires each year

Backyard grilling accidents result in more than 2,000 fires, 300 grill-related injuries and 30 or more deaths in the United States each year, according to the Insurance Information Institute.

Fortunately, the number of gas grill fires has dropped by 50 percent since the required implementation of propane cylinder overfilling prevention devices in 1998, according to a recent release by the National Fire Protection Association.

The safety device limits the release of gas should the cylinder become heated, reducing the chances of fire and possible injury.

However, the number of deaths associated with fires caused by charcoal grills remains the same.

More grilling accidents are to be expected with year-round grilling and the endless varieties of gas, charcoal and electric grills, along with fish cookers and turkey fryers. More than 14 million new barbecue grills were purchased nationwide in 2004, according to the Hearth, Patio and Barbeque Association.

Some of the leading causes of grill fires have been the ignition of combustibles or gas fuel, leaving the food unattended and grilling in an enclosed area, according to the NFPA statistics.

There are some cases where a combination of causes have been found, said Ronny Stallworth, Fire Inspector of the Fire and Emergency Services Division at Fort Rucker, Ala.

“There was one fire that involved a combination of improper charcoal lighter fluid—a possible mixture of gas and paint thinner,” said Stallworth. “Also, the grill was being used under the carport, which is against local regulations.”

Following a few safety and maintenance tips while using composite risk management can help to make outdoor grilling a an easy and fun experience during these summer months, said Stallworth.

The following is a list of suggestions from the National Safety Council:

- Wear a protective apron and oven mitt that fit over forearms.
- Always follow the manufacturers’ instructions that accompany grill.
- Never use a grill indoors. Use grill at least 10 feet away from any houses or buildings. Always use grills on level surfaces.
- Never leave grill unattended, especially when children and pets are nearby.
- Keep fire extinguisher handy and know how to properly use it.
- Make sure the gas cylinders from gas grills are always stored outside and away from houses. Valves should be turned off when not in use. Check regularly for leaks in connections using a soap and water mix that will show bubbles where gas escapes.
- When using charcoal grills, use a limited amount of starter fluid designed for those grills. Never use gasoline. Never add more liquid fuel, which could result in a flash fire. Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Always remember that grills remain hot even after cooking is completed.
- Be aware of local fire codes.

- If someone is burned, run cool water over the injury for 10-15 minutes. Fast medical attention should be administered if a serious burn occurs.

“Also, remember that grilling safety does not end after the food is cooked,” said Stallworth. “Make sure on gas grills, that the valves are turned off and on charcoal grills, ensure that the ashes are totally extinguished and left in place. There are two incidences I have seen lately, where charcoal was moved from the grill to a metal container and a fire started. Remember that charcoal can burn up to 48 hours after the grilling part is complete.”

For more information about grilling safety visit the National Fire Protection Association Web site at www.nfpa.org, Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association Web site at <http://hpba.org>, or the New York City Fire Department safety tips and Web site at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/fdny/html/safety/barbeque.shtml>.